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Primary Examiner — Roy Y Yi

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Patterson & Sheridan, LLP

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A fuser includes a fixing belt that is endless and includes a heat generating layer and circulates, an end restraining member that supports an end of the fixing belt, a heat generating source that is disposed around the fixing belt and heats the heat generating layer, an opposite part that contacts an outer peripheral surface of the fixing belt, a pressure part that is disposed inside the fixing belt and located at a position opposite to the opposite part, and presses the fixing belt to the opposite part side to form a nip between the fixing belt and the opposite part, and a rotation part that contacts an inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt at a position opposite to the heat generating source.

10 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

None

See application file for complete search history.

FIG. 2

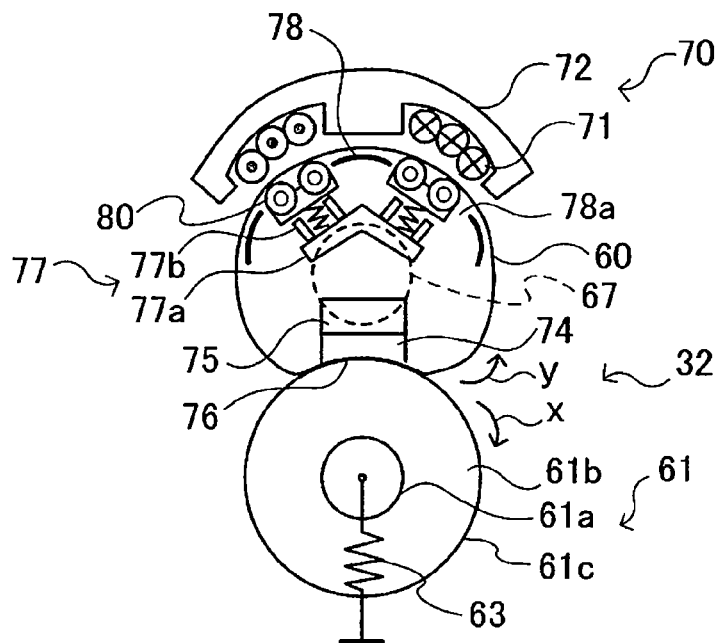


FIG. 3

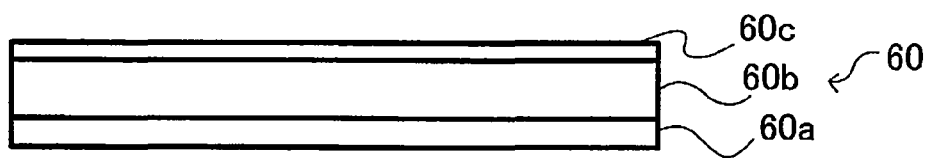


FIG. 4

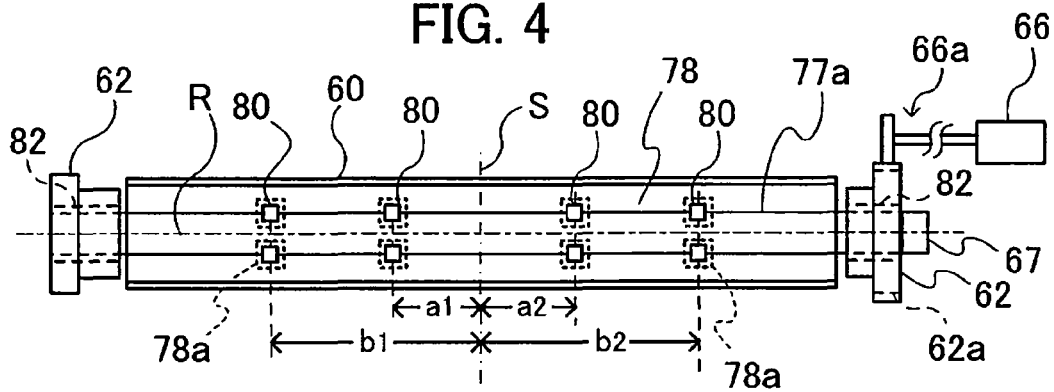


FIG. 5

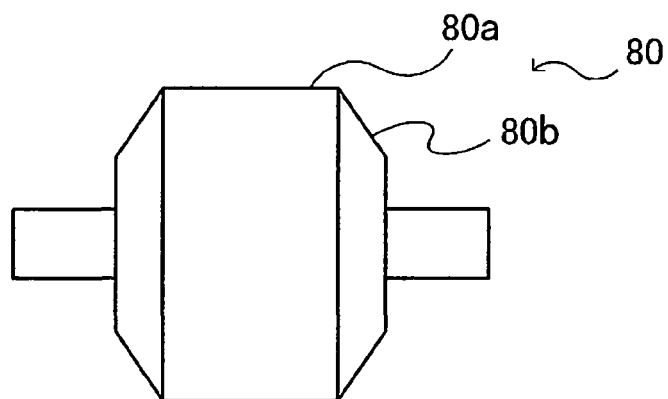


FIG. 6

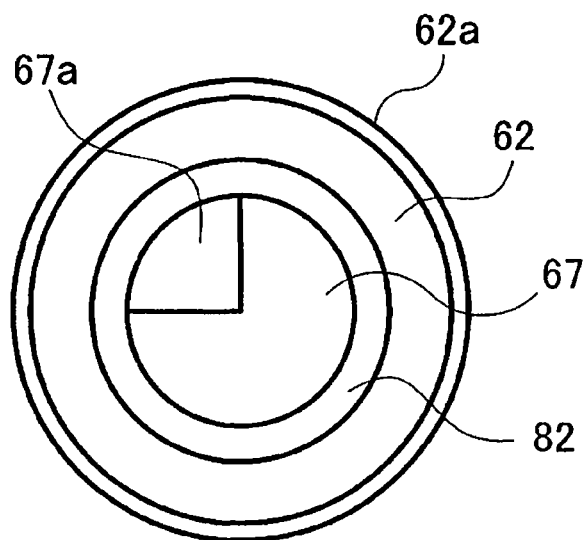
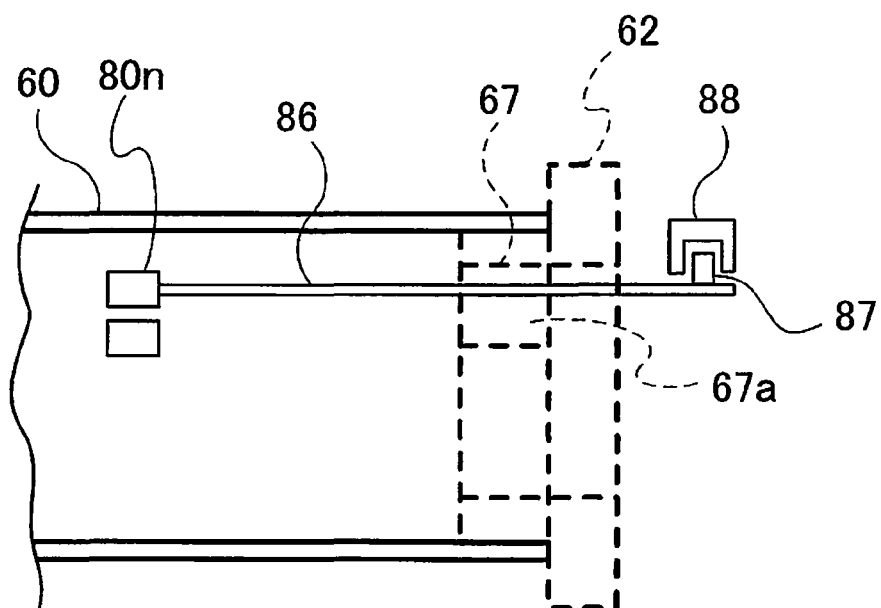


FIG. 7



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FUSER TO PREVENT FLUTTERING OF FIXING BELT

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a Divisional of Non Provisional patent application Ser. No. 13/396,216 filed Feb. 14, 2012, which is based upon and claims the benefit of priority from Provisional U.S. Application 61/475,620 filed on Apr. 14, 2011 the entire contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD

Embodiments described herein relate generally to a fuser used in an image forming apparatus and to a fuser to achieve stable running of a fixing belt.

BACKGROUND

As a fuser used in an image forming apparatus such as a copying machine or a printer, there is a fuser which uses a fixing belt having small heat capacity as a heat generating part to save energy of an external heat source, and achieves quick rise. In the fixing belt in which both sides thereof are supported by flanges for rotation running, a tensile force can not be applied to an intermediate area of the fixing belt in a rotation axis direction.

Thus, there is a fear that the intermediate area of the fixing belt which is free in a circumferential direction flutters at the time of rotation running. There is a fear that a gap between the fixing belt and the external heat source such as an induced current generating coil (IH coil) varies, and the fixing belt can not achieve uniform heating temperature.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic structural view showing an MFP including a fuser of an embodiment;

FIG. 2 is a schematic structural view of the fuser viewed from side;

FIG. 3 is a schematic explanatory view showing a layer structure of a fixing belt of the embodiment;

FIG. 4 is a schematic explanatory view showing arrangement of rollers inside the fixing belt;

FIG. 5 is a schematic side view showing the roller of the embodiment;

FIG. 6 is a schematic explanatory view of the fixing belt viewed from side; and

FIG. 7 is a schematic explanatory view showing a structure of a detection unit of the embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In general, according to one embodiment, a fuser includes a fixing belt that is endless and includes a heat generating layer and circulates, an end restraining member that supports an end of the fixing belt, a heat generating source that is disposed around the fixing belt and heats the heat generating layer, an opposite part that contacts an outer peripheral surface of the fixing belt, a pressure part that is disposed inside the fixing belt and located at a position opposite to the opposite part, and presses the fixing belt to the opposite part side to form a nip between the fixing belt and the opposite part, and a rotation part that contacts an inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt at a position opposite to the heat generating source.

Hereinafter, an embodiment will be described.

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FIG. 1 is a schematic structural view showing a color MFP (Multi Functional Peripheral) 1 as a tandem type image forming apparatus including a fuser of an embodiment. The MFP 1 includes a printer part 10 as an image forming part, a paper feed part 11 including a pickup roller 34, a paper discharge part 12 and a scanner 13.

The printer part 10 includes four sets of image forming stations 16Y, 16M, 16C and 16K of Y (Yellow), M (Magenta), C (Cyan) and K (black) arranged in parallel along an intermediate transfer belt 15. The respective image forming stations 16Y, 16M, 16C and 16K include photoconductive drums 17Y, 17M, 17C and 17K.

The respective image forming stations 16Y, 16M, 16C and 16K include, around the photoconductive drums 17Y, 17M, 17C and 17K rotating in an arrow a direction, chargers 18Y, 18M, 18C and 18K to uniformly charge surfaces of the photoconductive drums 17Y, 17M, 17C and 17K, developing devices 20Y, 20M, 20C and 20K to develop electrostatic latent images formed on the photoconductive drums 17Y, 17M, 17C and 17K by applying toner, and photoreceptor cleaners 21Y, 21M, 21C and 21K. The printer part 10 includes a laser exposure device 22 constituting an image forming unit. The laser exposure device 22 irradiates laser beams 22Y, 22M, 22C and 22K corresponding to the respective colors to the photoconductive drums 17Y, 17M, 17C and 17K. The laser exposure device 22 irradiates the laser beams and forms the electrostatic latent images on the photoconductive drums 17Y, 17M, 17C and 17K.

The printer part 10 includes a backup roller 27 and a driven roller 28 to support the intermediate transfer belt 15, and the intermediate transfer belt 15 runs in an arrow b direction. The printer part 10 includes primary transfer rollers 23Y, 23M, 23C and 23K at positions opposite to the respective photoconductive drums 17Y, 17M, 17C and 17K through the intermediate transfer belt 15. The respective primary transfer rollers 23Y, 23M, 23C and 23K primarily transfer toner images formed on the photoconductive drums 17Y, 17M, 17C and 17K to the intermediate transfer belt 15 and sequentially superimpose the toner images. The respective photoreceptor cleaners 21Y, 21M, 21C and 21K remove toners remaining on the photoconductive drums 17Y, 17M, 17C and 17K after the primary transfer.

The printer part 10 includes a secondary transfer roller 31 at a position opposite to the backup roller 27 through the intermediate transfer belt 15. The secondary transfer roller 31 is driven by the intermediate transfer belt 15 and rotates in an arrow c direction. At the time of secondary transfer, the printer part 10 forms a transfer bias in a nip between the intermediate transfer belt 15 and the secondary transfer roller 31, and collectively secondarily transfers the toner images on the intermediate transfer belt 15 to a sheet P passing through the nip.

The printer part 10 includes a fusing unit 32 as a fuser and a paper discharge roller pair 33 at the downstream side of the secondary transfer roller 31 along a conveyance path 36.

If a print operation starts in these components, the printer part 10 transfers the formed image to the sheet P as a recording medium fed from the paper feed part 11, and discharges the sheet to the paper discharge part 12 after fixing.

The image forming apparatus is not limited to the tandem type, and the number of the developing devices is not limited. The image forming apparatus may directly transfer a toner image to a recording medium from a photoreceptor.

The fusing unit 32 will be described in detail. As shown in FIG. 2, the fusing unit 32 includes a hollow endless fixing belt 60, a press roller 61 as an opposite part, an induced current generating coil (hereinafter referred to as IH coil) 70 as an

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induced current generating part, a pressure pad **74** as a pressure part, a temperature-sensitive magnetic plate **78** as a magnetic shunt member, a roller **80** as a rotation part in contact with an inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt **60**, and a support part **77** of the roller **80**.

For example, as shown in FIG. 3, the fixing belt **60** is formed by laminating an elastic layer **60b** and a mold release layer **60c** on a conductive layer **60a** as a heat generating layer. The fixing belt has only to include the heat generating layer, and only the mold release layer may be provided on the surface of the heat generating layer. The conductive layer **60a** generates heat by applying AC current with a frequency of, for example, 20 to 100 kHz to the IH coil **70**.

As the conductive layer **60a**, for example, nickel (Ni), copper (Cu), stainless or the like is used. The elastic layer **60b** of silicone rubber or the like is provided between the conductive layer **60a** and the mold release layer **60c**, so that the fixing property of the fusing unit **32** is improved. As the mold release layer **60c**, for example, fluorine resin such as PFA resin is used. The thicknesses of the elastic layer **60b** and the mold release layer **60c** are selected so as to prevent the heat capacity from becoming excessively large, and warming-up time of the fusing unit **32** is shortened.

The press roller **61** includes, for example, a heat resistant rubber layer **61b** on a surface of a core metal **61a**, and includes a mold release layer **61c** made of fluorine resin such as PFA resin on the surface. The press roller **61** includes a spring **63** to press the press roller **61** to the fixing belt **60** side.

As shown in FIG. 4, a flange **62** as an end restraining member supports an end of the fixing belt **60**. The flange **62** is fitted into the inner diameter of the fixing belt **60**, and keeps the end of the fixing belt **60** almost circular. The flange **62** is fixed to the inner diameter of the fixing belt **60** by, for example, an adhesive. The fixing between the flange **62** and the fixing belt **60** is not limited. The flange **62** and the fixing belt **60** are fitted to each other and caulking may be performed. For example, the flange **62** includes, at one side, a gear **62a** to transmit driving of a drive source **66** to the fixing belt **60** through a gear group **66a**. The fixing belt **60** rotates integrally with the flange **62**. The fixing belt **60** rotates independently of the press roller **61** or is driven and rotated by the press roller **61**.

The pressure pad **74** is located at a position opposite to the press roller **61** through the fixing belt **60**. The pressure pad **74** presses the inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt **60** to the press roller **61** side. The pressure pad **74** presses the fixing belt **60** to the press roller **61** side, and forms a nip **76** between the fixing belt **74** and the press roller **61**.

The pressure pad **74** is formed of, for example, heat resistant polyphenylene sulphide resin (PPS), liquid crystal polymer (LCP), phenol resin (PF) or the like. For example, a sheet having a good sliding property and a high abrasion resistance may be provided between the fixing belt **60** and the pressure pad **74**. The friction resistance between the fixing belt **60** and the pressure pad **74** can be further reduced by applying a lubricant, such as silicone oil, between the fixing belt **60** and the pressure pad **74**. A stay **75** for pad extending in the axial direction of the fixing belt **60** supports the pressure pad **74**, and fixes the pressure pad **74** to the inside of the fixing belt **60**. Each of both ends of the stay **75** for pad is fixed and supported by a fixed rod **67** passing through the flange **62**.

The IH coil **70** includes a coil **71** and a ferrite core **72** to intensify the magnetic field of the coil **71**. In the IH coil **70**, a high frequency current is applied to the coil **71** to generate a magnetic flux, so that an eddy current is generated in the conductive layer **60a** of the fixing belt **60**, the conductive layer **60a** generates heat, and the fixing belt **60** is heated.

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The temperature-sensitive magnetic plate **78** as the magnetic shunt member along the shape of the fixing belt **60** is provided inside the fixing belt **60** and at a position opposite to the IH coil **70**. Both ends of the temperature-sensitive magnetic plate **78** are fixed to the rods **67**. The temperature-sensitive magnetic plate **78** includes a magnetic shunt metal layer of, for example, Fe—Ni alloy (permalloy) having a specified Curie temperature. The function of the temperature-sensitive magnetic plate **78** varies at the Curie temperature. If the temperature does not reach the Curie temperature, the temperature-sensitive magnetic plate **78** guides the magnetic flux from the IH coil **70** and accelerates the quick rising of the fixing belt **60**. If the temperature reaches the Curie temperature, the temperature-sensitive magnetic plate **78** prevents abnormal heat generation of the fixing belt **60**.

The temperature-sensitive magnetic plate **78** includes plural windows **78a** for arranging the rollers **80**. The arrangement of the windows **78a** is symmetrical with respect to a center S of a rotation axis R of the fixing belt **60**. With respect to a center line S of the fixing belt **60** of FIG. 4, $a_1=a_2$ and $b_1=b_2$ are established. The rollers **80** are arranged symmetrically with respect to the center S of the fixing belt **60**, and the tensile force in the circumferential direction of the fixing belt **60** is uniform in the longitudinal direction of the fixing belt **60**. The arrangement position of the rollers **80** is not limited. The arrangement position of the rollers has only to be such that the tensile force is applied to the fixing belt **60** in the circumferential direction and fluttering of the fixing belt **60** can be prevented.

The roller **80** is made of, for example, a nonmagnetic heat-resistant material such as polyether ether ketone resin (PEEK), (PPS), (LCP) or (PF). The roller **80** is not excited by the IH coil **70**. As shown in FIG. 5, in order to reduce the contact area of the roller **80** with the fixing belt **60**, a taper **80b** is formed at an end of an outer peripheral surface **80a**. Since the contact area with the fixing belt **60** is small, the roller **80** does not inhibit the temperature rising of the fixing belt **60**.

The roller **80** rotatable contacts the inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt **60**. A stay **77a** for roller as a stay and a spring **77b** for roller as an elastic member constituting the support part **77** press the roller **80** to the fixing belt **60**. The spring **77b** for roller is formed of a nonmagnetic material such as stainless. The spring **77b** for roller causes the roller **80** to protrude from the surface of the temperature-sensitive magnetic plate **78** opposite to the fixing belt **60**, and separates the fixing belt **60** from the temperature-sensitive magnetic plate **78** more certainly. The roller **80** applies the tensile force to the fixing belt **60** in the circumferential direction by the elastic force of the spring **77b** for roller. The structure of the spring for roller is not limited and any spring such as a coil spring or a plate spring may be used.

The stay **77a** for roller extends in the axial direction of the fixing belt **60**. The fixed rod **67** fixes and supports both the ends of the stay **77a** for roller. The roller **80** is not elastically supported by the spring **77b** for roller, but may be fixed to the stay **77a** for roller. However, if the roller **80** is fixed to the stay **77a** for roller, the outer periphery of the roller **80** protrudes to the outside from the inner peripheral surface position of the fixing belt **60**. The outer periphery of the roller **80** is made to protrude to the outside from the inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt **60** and the tensile force is applied to the fixing belt **60** in the circumferential direction.

The rod **67** is, for example, cylindrical, and passes through the flange **62**. The flange **62** supports the rod **67** through a bearing **82**. As shown in FIG. 6, the rod **67** includes a notch **67a** at a part. The notch **67a** prevents the air inside the fixing

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belt 60 from being sealed. In order to prevent the air inside the fixing belt 60 from being sealed, an air hole may be formed in the rod 67.

The fusing unit 32 includes a detection unit 84 to detect the rotation of the fixing belt 60. The detection unit 84 detects the rotation of the roller 80 inside the fixing belt 60, and detects the rotation of the fixing belt 60. For example, as shown in FIG. 7, a rotation shaft 86 of a roller 80n at the farthest end inside the fixing belt 60 is extended to the outside of the fixing belt 60 through the notch 67a of the rod 67. The rotation shaft 86 includes a rotor 87 at the outside of the fixing belt 60. The detection unit 84 includes, for example, a photosensor 88 to detect the rotor 87 around the fixing belt 60.

If a warming-up operation is started by turning ON a power supply, in the fusing unit 32, the conductive layer 60a of the fixing belt 60 generates heat by excitation of the IH coil 70. Besides, the press roller 61 applies pressure to the pressure pad 74 by the spring 63 at the time of warming-up, and rotates in an arrow x direction. The fixing belt 60 rotates in an arrow y direction by the drive source 66 through the gear group 66a and the gear 62a.

While the fixing belt 60 rotates, the flanges 62 regulate both sides of the fixing belt 60. Further, in an area of the fixing belt 60 opposite to the IH coil 70, the fixing belt 60 does not flutter and rotates in the arrow y direction while keeping a specified gap from the IH coil 70, since the roller 80 applies the tensile force to the fixing belt 60. While the fixing belt 60 rotates, the fixing belt 60 uniformly generates heat, and the fixing performance is improved, since the gap between the fixing belt 60 and the IH coil 70 is kept constant.

While the fixing belt 60 rotates, there is no fear that the inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt 60 contacts the temperature-sensitive magnetic plate 78, since the fixing belt 60 does not flutter in the area opposite to the IH coil 70. The roller 80 prevents the increase of drive torque of the fixing belt 60, the abrasion of the inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt 60 and the occurrence of shavings by the abrasion of the fixing belt 60, which are caused if the inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt 60 contacts the temperature-sensitive magnetic plate 78. The roller 80 stably rotates the fixing belt 60, prolongs the life of the fixing belt 60 and prevents the dirt due to the shavings.

The gap between the fixing belt 60 and the IH coil 70 does not slant with respect to the center S of the fixing belt 60, since the rollers 80 are arranged symmetrically with respect to the center S of the fixing belt 60. The fixing belt 60 can achieve uniform heat generation over the whole length in the longitudinal direction.

If the fixing belt 60 generates heat, the air inside the fixing belt 60 inflates. The inflated air is discharged to the outside through the notch 67a formed in the rod 67, and the increase of the inner pressure of the fixing belt 60 is prevented.

If the fixing belt 60 reaches the fixable temperature, the fusing unit 32 completes the warming-up and is placed in a ready mode. While the ready mode, the fusing unit 32 rotates the fixing belt 60 in the arrow y direction by the drive source 66 if required, excites the IH coil 70, and keeps the fixing belt 60 at the ready temperature. While the ready mode, the spring 63 is adjusted, and the press roller 61 reduces the pressing force of the press roller 61 to the pressure pad 74 to a pressure in the ready mode. The pressing force of the press roller 61 is reduced to prevent the fixing belt 60 or the pressure pad 74 from distorting.

While the ready mode, and while the fixing belt 60 rotates in the arrow y direction, the tensile force in the circumferential direction by the roller 80 is generated in the intermediate area of the fixing belt 60 opposite to the IH coil 70. The fixing

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belt 60 does not flutter, the gap between the fixing belt 60 and the IH coil 70 is kept constant, and the uniform ready temperature is kept.

If the MFP 1 starts the print operation, the fusing unit 32 fixes a toner image formed in the printer part 10 to the sheet P. The fusing unit 32 adjusts the spring 63, presses the press roller 61 to the pressure pad 74 by high pressure, and rotates the press roller in the arrow x direction. The fixing belt 60 rotates in the arrow y direction, and the fixing belt 60 generates heat at fixing temperature by the excitation of the IH coil 70.

While fixing, and the fixing belt 60 rotates in the arrow y direction, the tensile force in the circumferential direction by the roller 80 is generated in the intermediate area of the fixing belt 60, and suppresses the fluttering of the fixing belt 60. While the rotation of the fixing belt 60, the gap between the fixing belt 60 and the IH coil 70 can be kept constant, and the fixing belt 60 achieves uniform heat generation in the longitudinal direction.

If the center area of the fixing belt 60 is not regulated in the circumferential direction by the roller 80, there is a fear that the intermediate area of the fixing belt 60 distorts and fluttering occurs while the rotation. The fixing belt 60 stops rotation for a long time, and a specific part in contact with the press roller 61 is in the nip state for the long time, and as a result, even if a creep phenomenon occurs, the creep phenomenon is relieved by the roller 80.

If the center area of the fixing belt 60 is not regulated in the circumferential direction by the roller 80 and the fixing belt 60 flutters, there is a fear that the inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt 60 contacts the temperature-sensitive magnetic plate 78. If the inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt 60 contacts the temperature-sensitive magnetic plate 78, the rotation of the fixing belt becomes unstable by the increase of the drive torque of the fixing belt 60, and there is a fear that the inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt 60 is abraded, shavings occur, and the life of the fixing belt 60 becomes short.

While the fixing belt 60 rotates in the arrow y direction, the fusing unit 32 detects the rotation of the roller 80n at the farthest end inside the fixing belt 60. The roller 80n contacts the fixing belt 60, and is driven and rotated if the fixing belt 60 rotates. For example, if the fixing belt 60 is broken and stops the rotation, the roller 80n also stops the rotation. The detection unit 84 uses the photosensor 88 to detect the rotor 87 of the rotation shaft 86 rotating together with the roller 80n. If the photosensor 88 detects the rotation of the rotor 87, the MFP 1 recognizes that the fixing belt 60 rotates, and continues the driving of the fusing unit 32. If the photosensor 88 can not detect the rotation of the rotor 87, the MFP 1 recognizes that the fixing belt 60 is broken, and forcibly stops (down) the driving.

Since the rotation of the roller 80 driven and rotated by the fixing belt 60 is detected and the rotation of the fixing belt 60 is detected, the breakage of the fixing belt 60 can be more certainly detected. There is no fear that excitation of the IH coil 70 is continued although the fixing belt 60 does not rotate, and the fixing belt 60 locally generates heat to become hot, and the further safety of the fusing unit 32 is obtained.

According to the embodiment, in the area opposite to the IH coil 70, the roller 80 contacts the inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt 60. While the rotation of the fixing belt 60, both the sides of the fixing belt 60 are regulated by the flanges 62, and in the intermediate area of the fixing belt 60, the roller 80 applies the tensile force to the fixing belt 60 in the circumferential direction. The fluttering of the fixing belt 60 in the intermediate area is prevented while the rotation. The gap between the fixing belt 60 and the IH coil 70 is kept constant

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over the whole length in the longitudinal direction, and uniform heat generation of the fixing belt **60** is obtained. The inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt **60** is prevented from contacting the temperature-sensitive magnetic plate **78**, the fixing belt **60** is stably rotated, and a high quality fixed image is obtained.

While certain embodiments have been described these embodiments have been presented by way of example only, and are not intended to limit the scope of the inventions. Indeed, the novel apparatus and methods described herein may be embodied in a variety of other forms: furthermore, various omissions, substitutions and changes in the form of the apparatus and methods described herein may be made without departing from the spirit of the inventions. The accompanying claims and their equivalents are intended to cover such forms of modifications as would fall within the scope and spirit of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A fuser comprising:

a fixing belt that is endless, includes a heat generating layer, and is configured to circulate;

an opposing unit that contacts an outer peripheral surface of the fixing belt;

a pressure unit that is disposed inside the fixing belt and located at a position opposite to the opposing unit, and presses the fixing belt towards the opposing unit such that a nip is formed between the fixing belt and the opposite part; and

a plurality of rotation units that are disposed along a longitudinal direction of the nip, and contact an inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt in an area opposite to the nip and inside the fixing belt.

2. The fuser of claim 1, further comprising:

a support unit that supports at least one of the rotation units and applies a tensile force to the fixing belt in a circumferential direction through the rotation unit.

3. The fuser of claim 2, wherein the support unit includes an elastic member urging the rotation unit toward an outward direction of the fixing belt, and a stay supporting the elastic member.

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4. The fuser of claim 1, further comprising:

a detection unit configured to detect rotation of one of the rotation units.

5. The fuser of claim 1, wherein the rotation units are arranged symmetrically with respect to a center of the nip in the longitudinal direction.

6. An image forming apparatus comprising:

an image forming unit configured to form an image on a recording medium;

a fixing belt that is endless, includes a heat generating layer, circulates, and contacts the recording medium so as to fix the image on the recording medium;

an opposing unit that contacts an outer peripheral surface of the fixing belt;

a pressure unit that is disposed inside the fixing belt and located at a position opposite to the opposing unit, and presses the fixing belt towards the opposing unit such that a nip is formed between the fixing belt and the opposite part; and

a plurality of rotation units that are disposed along a longitudinal direction of the nip, and contact an inner peripheral surface of the fixing belt in an area opposite to the nip and inside the fixing belt.

7. The apparatus of claim 6, further comprising:

a support unit that supports at least one of the rotation units and applies a tensile force to the fixing belt in a circumferential direction through the rotation unit.

8. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the support unit includes an elastic member urging the rotation unit toward an outward direction of the fixing belt, and a stay supporting the elastic member.

9. The apparatus of claim 6, further comprising:

a detection unit configured to detect rotation of one of the rotation units.

10. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the rotation units are arranged symmetrically with respect to a center of the nip in the longitudinal direction.

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